

## FEATURED INTERVIEW

# The colorful story why TaylorMade prexy Mark King is nicknamed Rambo, why he thinks David Feherty is irrelevant, Johnny Miller boring, and Bill Murray a buffoon.

*King idolizes former Green Bay Packers coach, Vince Lombardi; highly respects adidas Group honcho, Herbert Hainer; admires the achievements of Titleist's Wally Uihlein, and considers Donald Trump to be a marketing genius.*

BY EDWARD F. PAZDUR, CHAIRMAN & CEO  
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CARLSBAD, CALIFORNIA: Sitting down for a chat with Mark King, president and CEO of TaylorMade-adidas Golf Company, is always a unique experience. He has a pleasant smile, a pleasing personality, four private club championships, and a scratch handicap. But, the meeting can also be controversial, argumentative or intellectually challenging. The nature of the questions controls the mood and atmosphere.



MARK KING,  
CEO & PRESIDENT  
TAYLORMADE-ADIDAS

*“At times we would see Rambo King emerge from a wooded rough, like Rambo Stallone emerging From a jungle. King is bleeding and sweating in shredded clothes, but still gets his ball in the hole to beat his opponent.”- JIMMY LETOURNEAU, GENERAL MANAGER, SHADOWRIDGE COUNTRY CLUB*

King is a man with strong convictions. His inborn grit and resoluteness have combined to help him achieve his goals. Two of his associates, Jim Stutts, former CEO of TaylorMade, and Jimmy Letourneau, general manager of Shadowridge Country Club, can personally vouch for King's bulldog tenacity. For example, in August of 1999, when TaylorMade's annual sales were a meager \$300 million, Stutts talked King into leaving his job as VP of golf ball sales and marketing of Callaway to become president of TaylorMade. Shortly after King took charge of TaylorMade, Stutts was moved up by adidas (owner of TaylorMade) to bolster its Asia Pacific market. His confidence in King paid off. It took King less than nine years to grow TaylorMade's modest annual sales of \$300 million in 1999 to over \$1 billion in 2007 and \$1.2 billion in 2009.



MARK KING'S HOME CLUB, SHADOWRIDGE IN VISTA, CALIFORNIA, HAS PLACED FOUR PLATES ON HIS LOCKER IN TRIBUTE TO HIS FOUR CLUB CHAMPIONSHIPS. AND, AFFECTIONATELY, HAS REPLACED HIS NAME PLATE FROM THE TOP OF THE LOCKER WITH HIS NICKNAME: RAMBO.

### MARK KING AKA RAMBO

Jimmy Letourneau, general manager of King's club, Shadowridge Country Club in Vista, California, loves to tell a very colorful, true story about why he nicknamed King after Sylvester Stallone's movie warrior—*Rambo*.

“King, like *Rambo*, is a fighter,” said Letourneau. “In his movies, *Rambo* would swing from tree to tree, run through an uninhabitable forest and come out in a shredded, bloody, camouflaged uniform to claim his victim. King's golf game is very similar. At times, we would see Mark ‘*Rambo*’ King emerge from a heavily wooded rough with thorny bushes. He's cut. He's scratched. He's bleeding. He's sweating. His once beautiful golf apparel is shredded and covered with mud.

“Nevertheless, he manages to get the ball in the hole, for a birdie or par, to beat the guys he’s playing against,” joshed Letourneau. “Our club has quite a few very low handicappers,” said Letourneau. “So, our annual club championship event is paramount here and taken seriously.

“Mark ‘*Rambo*’ King plays scratch and won our club championship *four* times; in 1992, 1993, 2000 and 2002. “We pay tribute to our club champions by placing a brass plate on their locker door. When you walk by King’s locker, it’s stunning to see four championship brass plates on his locker,” extolled Letourneau.

*Rambo*, of course, plays with the new 2010 Burner SuperFast clubs by TaylorMade and the new five-layer Penta TP ball. *Rambo*’s clubhead speed is about 105 mph, ball speed about 158 mph, and tee shots about 270 yards. On downhill fairways, some of King’s tee shots can roll about 290 yards.

*When asked which of these five American tycoons; Bill Gates, Jack Nicklaus, Donald Trump, Phil Knight, or Wally Uihlein, would he consult for business advice, King chose Titleist’s Wally Uihlein and Donald Trump.*

#### GETTING DOWN TO BUSINESS

In my opinion, growing a company to over \$1.2 billion in annual sales requires more than God-given skills or an Ivy League degree in business administration. After interviewing distinguished chairmen and CEOs over the past 40 years, I have learned they all have the following two traits: commitment and instinct.

It would take a book, let alone this column, for me to intellectually justify my rationale logically. My instinct leads me to believe King has both of these traits, and because I didn’t want to bore you with an article probing King with philosophical questions, I quizzed him about business honchos he idolizes.

“Which of these tycoons,” I asked, “would you consult for business advice? Jack Nicklaus, Phil Knight of Nike, Bill Gates of Microsoft, Wally Uihlein of Titleist, or Donald Trump?”

“I would first continue to consult with the executive I hold in high esteem,” replied King, “my boss, Herbert Hainer, chairman and CEO of adidas Group.

“For views from those you have named, I would choose two principals, each with a different perspective. They would be Wally Uihlein, chairman and CEO of the Acushnet Company comprised of Titleist and FootJoy, and Donald Trump, chairman and CEO of The Trump Organization. Wally Uihlein has run Titleist and FootJoy masterfully for decades. Anybody who can sit at the top of an organization for that long, with such great success, must be a really, really good chief executive. Mr. Trump, I think, is a bit controversial, but he has creative ideas, thinks big, and makes them come true. We manufacture some special makeup golf clubs for his golf courses and get very involved in his activities with golf. I think Mr. Trump is shrewd and a marketing genius,” said King. “Those two would be my choices.”

#### THE KEN VENTURI DILEMMA

“Would you agree the networks are failing to present interesting and informative color commentary after Ken Venturi retired in 2002? How would you rate today’s TV analysts?”

“I just don’t think anyone will ever match Ken Venturi’s skill as an analyst or his 35-year tenure with CBS,” said King.



(ABOVE) HERBERT HAINER, CHAIRMAN & CEO OF ADIDAS GROUP IN GERMANY; (ABOVE RIGHT) DONALD TRUMP, PRESIDENT & CEO OF THE TRUMP ORGANIZATION; AND (RIGHT) WALLY UIHLEIN, CHAIRMAN & CEO OF ACUSHNET COMPANY,

“Do you think Ken Venturi should be in the World Golf Hall of Fame?”

“Yes, absolutely.”

“He’s not.”

“Why not?”

“Technical rule reasons.”

“Really? I don’t know the politics involved, but if a guy with Venturi’s integrity in golf can’t get in, who could?” asked King.

“That’s the general consensus within the industry,” I added. “Venturi and Jim Nantz were a team for 17 years at CBS before Ken retired in 2002. Nantz broadcast his 25th Masters last April.”

#### FEHERTY IS IRREVERENT

“Jack Nicklaus is very critical about golf coverage by the TV networks. You invest a lot of money into television and watch televised golf tournaments for recreational and professional reasons. Would you agree with Jack? How do you feel about today’s golf analysts?”

“Nicklaus is concerned because he knows how important TV is to the game,” replied King. “The golf industry is trying to get people excited about playing the game through television.”

“What do you think of Nantz?”

“Jim Nantz is special for me,” said King. “I love listening to him. He always seems to say the right thing at the right time. One day, Nantz should be in the World Golf Hall of Fame.

“I also like Nick Faldo a lot,” King quickly emphasized. “Faldo’s got the right balance of saying things that are a little controversial, but not so controversial that you don’t want to listen to him. I’m a big Nick Faldo fan today.”

“What do you think of Johnny Miller?”

“Miller’s just the opposite of Nantz,” groused King. “He always says the wrong thing at the wrong time. Always! He keeps repeating the same experiences. I don’t know. You can be sure I’m not a big Johnny Miller fan. I don’t mean that about Miller personally or as a golfer. I mean I just don’t care to listen to his commentary on TV.”

“I hope, Mark, you’ll agree with me about David Feherty. He thinks it’s amusing to be vulgar, rude and lewd. He is premeditatedly ribald and tasteless in his published articles and TV commentary. Do you watch or read him?”

“David Feherty, to me, is irreverent and irrelevant,” stated King.



CBS SPORTS PLAY-BY-PLAY ANCHOR JIM NANTZ (RIGHT), WHO COMPLETED HIS 25TH CONSECUTIVE MASTERS TELECAST LAST APRIL, WAS JOINED BY NICK FALDO (LEFT) IN 2007 AS CHIEF ANALYST. KEN VENTURI’S RETIREMENT IN 2002 CREATED A TUMULTUOUS FOUR-YEAR DILEMMA FOR CBS TO FIND NANTZ’S TEAMMATE UNTIL FALDO JOINED NANTZ AND SUCCESSFULLY RESOLVED THE CBS QUANDARY.

BUFFOON BILL MURRAY

I then asserted my pet peeve.

“Should buffoons like Bill Murray be allowed to clown around on the golf course during a nationally televised golf tournament?”

“I think he should be allowed as a comedian with strict limits and it doesn’t slow down play time,” replied King.

“Like what limits?”

“He should not, for example, be allowed to lie down in the middle of a sand trap. I’m interested in getting more people to play golf and we’ve got to make it more fun.”

“What about etiquette?”

“That’s where I think he could go too far,” said King. “There has to be respect for etiquette. But, at the end of the day, Bill Murray clowns around in the televised AT&T Pebble Beach Clambake, and that’s what he is. I don’t have a big problem with it.”

#### RAMBO, THE CADDIE

As president and CEO of TaylorMade-adidas worldwide, King’s daily experiences, personal and professional, are stressful and exciting. Some are fun, like caddying for Sergio Garcia and Natalie Gulbis.

One day, at a Tuesday night dinner during Masters week, Sergio Garcia asked King to caddie at the traditional Wednesday Par-3 contest preceding the Masters, which starts on Thursday at Augusta National.

“It was the thrill of my life,” recalled King. “I met Sergio in the morning, got my white Augusta caddie outfit, loaded the bag and we walked over to the par-3, 1,060-yard course. The first hole was the longest on the whole course—130 yards!” chuckled King. “Some holes were 65 yards. Caddying for Sergio in front of a throng of 50,000 people and walking through the crowd, between holes, with paths only 20 yards wide, was the thrill of a lifetime,” sighed King.

“Earlier this year in March it was arranged for me to caddie for our LPGA Tour pro, Natalie Gulbis, during a 9-hole practice round at the LPGA Kia Classic, hosted by La Costa Resort & Spa in Carlsbad, California. We met on Tuesday morning at 6:30 A.M.,” recalled King, “while it was still dark outside. Natalie likes to hit balls on the practice range before anybody gets there. We hit balls until 7:00 A.M., when it got light. Her caddie was present and I hired him to be my assistant.

“He raked the bunkers, got yardages and made it possible for me to play nine holes with Natalie, talk about her career and to watch her game. It was a wonderful way to spend some meaningful time together,” noted King.



RAMBO KING CADDIED FOR SERGIO GARCIA (LEFT) AT THE MASTERS’ WEDNESDAY PAR 3 CONTEST PRECEDING THE MASTERS ON THURSDAY. KING CADDIED-PLAYED WITH NATALIE GULBIS (ABOVE) IN A 9-HOLE PRACTICE ROUND AT THE LPGA KIA CLASSIC, HOSTED BY LA COSTA RESORT & SPA IN CALIFORNIA. WHY? TO SPEND SOME MEANINGFUL TIME TOGETHER.

## CHASE PERFECTION, SETTLE FOR EXCELLENCE

King, today, is still a diehard Green Bay Packers fan and an idolizer of former Packers Coach Vince Lombardi.

When King was born in 1959, Vince Lombardi became head coach of the Green Bay Packers and they grew up together. Lombardi became a National Football League (NFL) legend by winning five NFL Championships and two Super Bowls during his eight-year tenure as coach of the Packers—and a paragon who molded and influenced the integrity and character of Mark King.

“If you’re from Green Bay, and if you’re from that era, Lombardi was your hero,” proclaimed King. “He stood for everything you would want to stand for as a human being. He went to church every day. He was a family man. He loved and demanded the most out of his players. And, as much as his players feared his intensity, they were devoted and totally committed to him. He left Green Bay in 1968 to become the coach of the Washington Redskins and died of cancer in 1970.”

“You speak so affectionately about him.”

“I do,” replied King, “and always will.

“When I took on the presidency of TaylorMade, I didn’t have much experience in presiding over a large corporation. But, I did know how to work hard, treat people decently, get up earlier than everybody else and to pursue a very high level of expectation.

“Those are just some of the principles I’ve learned from Lombardi and apply at TaylorMade. Running a football team is no different than running any kind of organization,” said King. “The principles are the same. The object is to excel and produce better products than our competitors.

“Lombardi believed there is no room for second best. So do I. It’s always been an American goal to be number one and I’m proud of our achievements here,” proclaimed King.

### KING’S THREE PRINCIPLES

“I like to think that we, at TaylorMade, were helped by three of Lombardi principles,” said King. “The first is to remember our achievements are the results of a combined effort from every individual here. Second, that the measure of who we are is what we do with what we have. And third, the difference between a successful person and others is not a lack of strength, not a lack of knowledge, but rather a lack of will.

“I’m convinced that greatness is not acquired by God-given skills. We earn it by learning how to work efficiently, treat people cordially, and believe in ourselves. Those are values,” asserted King, “that I learned from Lombardi and growing up in Green Bay. The one Lombardi quote I’ve treasured ever since I was a kid and use it here is: ‘Chase perfection and accept excellence.’

“Vince Lombardi lived it every day, and so do I,” declared King.

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THE LATE VINCENT THOMAS LOMBARDI BEGAN HIS COACHING CAREER WITH THE GREEN BAY PACKERS IN 1959 AND, IN HIS ROOKIE YEAR, WAS NAMED NFL COACH OF THE YEAR. HE WON FIVE NFL TITLES AS WELL AS SUPER BOWLS I AND II. HE DIED OF CANCER ON SEPTEMBER 3, 1970 IN WASHINGTON, D.C. IN 1971 THE NFL RENAMED THE SUPER BOWL TROPHY THE VINCE LOMBARDI SUPER BOWL TROPHY.